

Future of windrow program to be considered by Council this week

The future of windrow clearing in Aurora will be considered this week by Council as municipal staff recommend the pilot program be discontinued this winter.

According to a report before Council by Matthew Volpintesta, Manager of Parks and Fleet, staff tasked with clearing the windrows the snow that accumulates at the end of a driveway after a snow plow passes of those seniors and mobility-challenged individuals who subscribed to the program experienced significant challenges in the 2024-25 winter season.

Subsequent user surveys, he added, indicate that those who subscribed to the program found program delivery poor, based on equipment limitations and program participant expectations.

The 2024-2025 winter season saw a total accumulation of 188 cm of snowfall, says Volpintesta in his report. This amount was more than double the 2023-2024 total (93 cm). As a result, the program was deployed to remove windrows during eight events, including five dates during the SWE (Significant Weather Event) from February 12, 2025 to February 24, 2025. A total of 468 applicants participated in the program of which 84 participants were exempt from the \$100 fee under [the] low-income threshold.

There was a lower registration this past winter, the report continues, citing the \$100 subscription fee introduced in last year's version of the pilot as a factor.

With a lower registration than the previous program season, only three seasonal employees were hired to assist in service delivery, the report continues. The seasonal hires were frequently complemented with full-time Parks Operators once other winter operations were completed. As Parks Operators are presently responsible for several winter operational services full-time staff were utilized in performing the windrow service on several occasions to meet or exceed the 24-hour service standard for windrow removal.

Further, during the five events within the SWE declared, full-time staff were heavily relied upon to attempt to manage rapidly accumulating snowfall, staff driving hours, and mandatory rest periods.

Outside of staffing, the equipment used to make the program a reality is lacking, the report notes. Most municipalities use front-end loaders or tractors with pneumatic arms to get the job done, Aurora is using standard pick-up trucks equipped with plow blades.

A significant limitation of this type of setup is the inability to raise snow past a certain height and the power lacking to push snow of a certain density. This poses issues moving snow and with snow storage particularly where the distance between homes may only be divided by two or three feet of sod strip. The current standard of cleaning snow is one car width (or eight feet) to allow for a single vehicle to have access.

Snow volumes, in some instances, resulted in staff having to use more acceleration to take a run at a snowbank, increasing risk of damage to private property, and danger to staff and public, particularly under slippery conditions.

Up to 80 complaints about service were received over the course of the season, suggesting a less-than-optimal approval rating of the program, the report notes, adding that staff fielded five requests for refunds that were denied based on the service standard outlined in the agreement signed by each participant.

Should Council proceed with the pilot program for a third year, staff suggest upgrading equipment or contracting out the service.

A costing for these options was not completed in time to make the report, but each of the four to six front-end loaders equipped with a pneumatic blade arm, could run between \$200,000 to \$300,000 per vehicle.

If directed by Council to perform the program in future, an initial cost is estimated between \$1.5 to 2 million at onset, not including

annual maintenance, fuel, or staff, with expectation of full funding sourced from the tax-levy,? says Volpintesta. ?If Council directs staff to explore using external contracting to perform the windrow service beyond 2025-2026, based on the customized nature of the recommended equipment and factoring global supply chains, any contractor would likely require a similar amount of time to procure equipment from a supplier and build the custom attachments.

?Based on 468 applicants, 84 of which were subsidized, the total program revenue collected based on the \$100 application fee was \$38,400. The cost to hire three seasonal employees including the additional overtime spent by full time Parks staff, to deliver the program was \$91,154.75, resulting in an approximate net program cost of \$52,754.75. This net operating cost does not include the time spent by permanent staff to administer this program, such as the registration of applicants, addressing of customer service-related complaints, as well as other department administration, such as Communications, Fleet and IT. As per this pilot program's funding strategy, the noted net operating cost shortfall will be offset through a transfer from the tax rate stabilization reserve in 2025. A future permanent program model would require funding from the tax levy.?

By Brock Weir